

EARTH'S VANITIES AND HEAVEN'S VERITIES

NO. 2346

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1894
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Surely every man walks in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain:
he heaps up riches and knows not who shall gather them.
And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in You.
Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.”*
Psalms 39:6-8

THESE are solemn words. Sometimes we have a more joyful theme than this, but I believe that spiritually, as well as naturally, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. A meditation of a quiet kind on things not as they are in fiction, but as they prove to be in fact, is always salutary. There is a great mass of sorrow in the world, and all of us meet with something, every now and then, to calm our spirit, and cool our blood.

So tonight, if we think a little of the fleeting character of this world, and of the real world where certainty alone is to be found, and if we school ourselves to learn facts and realities, by the blessing of God's Spirit, we may go away even more lastingly refreshed than if our hearts were made to leap for joy by meditation upon some transporting theme.

I will have no further preface, there is too much in the text itself to allow time for a lengthy introduction. Therefore, notice first, that *David records his view of human life*, “Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heaps up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.” Then next, *David expresses his own emotions in contemplation of these things*, “And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.” And then, in the third place, *David offers an appropriate and needful prayer*, for he cries, “Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish.”

I. First then, let us notice that in our text DAVID RECORDS HIS VIEW OF HUMAN LIFE.

You will notice that he puts “surely” twice over in this verse, and with the “verily” of the fifth verse, which has the same meaning, but might have been translated “surely,” he has uttered the same word three times, “surely, surely, surely,” or if you please, “verily, verily, verily.” He half reminds us of his greater Son, the Son of David, whose speech was often emphasized with that sacred assuring word, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” David here seems to tell us that there is nothing sure except that nothing is sure. “Surely,” says he, “nothing on earth is sure, verily there is not verity anywhere here below.”

There is a land of verities, there is a home of “surelies,” some of us are on the way thither, and have already the earnest of our inheritance, but as for you who have your portion in this life, you have vanity not verity, change is written on everything earthly.

Having thus given us the keynote of certainty—for the psalmist did not write at haphazard, but he wrote what he knew, he wrote what he had experienced, and he wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God—we should the more carefully look at what he has written. If it be so surely, let us be sure to know what it is.

And first, he seems to me to speak of life as a walk, and of that he says, “Surely every man walketh in a vain shew.” Then he speaks of life as a worry, and of that he says, “Surely they are disquieted in vain.” And then he speaks of life as a success, as men call it, and of that he says, “He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.”

David first speaks of *life as a walk*. He seems to have had in his mind the idea of a great procession, "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew." If you choose to go to the Lord Mayor's show next Saturday, you may see a vain show, and may know precisely what David meant. Such things were more common in Oriental countries than they are with us, but whether it is the Lord Mayor's show or any other, it is a picture of what this mortal life is.

The procession, if you see it, or if you do not see it, but only read and hear of it, may remind you of what life is, what you see of it is all show. There are kings in the show, and princes in the show, and heroes of old time in the show, but there are neither kings, nor princes, nor heroes there in reality. It is all show, and such is this mortal life to a large extent.

Among some classes of society, show is everything, they must "keep up appearances." Just so, and all the world over, that is about all there is—"appearances"—a vain show. If you want reality, you cannot see it, the unseen is real. If you want shadow, you can see it, "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." I wish we could get a hold of that idea as a practical thing, that everything we can see is shadow, but what we cannot see is the real substance.

When we talk about faith, men call us "visionary." Well, well, you may call us that if you like, for we have vision of a very high order, but we beg to return the word to you in its ordinary meaning, for if you make your treasure of what you can see and handle, you are the visionaries, for this is but a vain show in which you rejoice, and that which you see with your eyes is but a vision, a dream that vanisheth when one awaketh.

Earthly life is only a show. Oh, friends, I wish we really thought this! We would not be so hot-brained as we are if we said to ourselves, "These are only shadows." We would not be so vexed and worried as we are if we often said to ourselves, "These are shadows. I could not see them if they were not. If they were real, they would not be perceptible to my senses, they would only be perceptible by the higher faculty of faith." "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew." It is a show and nothing more.

But it is a passing show, for David does not say, "Surely every man sits down in a vain shew, and remains in the same place," but "every man *walketh* in a vain shew." It is with life as with a procession which passes before your eyes. It comes, hark to the shouts of the people! It is here in a few minutes, there are the people crowding the streets, but presently it has vanished and is gone. Does not life strike you as being just that?

I remember, oh, I remember so many figures in the procession! I have seemed to stand as at a window, though that itself has been but seeming, for I also have been in the procession. I recollect the great hearty men of my boyhood, whom I used to hear pray, they are now singing up yonder. Then, when I think of you, dear friends, I remember a long procession of saintly men and godly women who have all passed before me, and have gone into glory. What a host of friends we have in the unseen world, "gone over to the majority!" As we get older, they really are the majority, and our friends on earth are outnumbered by our friends in heaven.

Some of you will fondly remember dear ones who have passed away in the procession, but please recollect that you also are in the procession. Though they seem to have passed before you, you have been passing along with them, and you may reach the vanishing point before long, and then there will be this talk among the brotherhood you love, "he too, has gone," or "she has fallen asleep," for we are all walking as in a procession, and passing away to the land of substance and reality.

A show which is passing away is in itself, if it be measured by this mortal life, vain, "a vain shew." To a man who has no hope hereafter, it is all "vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Within the narrow compass of this poor globe there is nothing that is worth a man's opening his mouth to ask for or to receive. Take the broader, larger circle of the heavens, and there within that boundless circumference, there is something to be found that is worth finding. Dwell in God, and you have something substantial, dwell out of God and you make "much ado about nothing." Life is a vain show when it is lived apart from God.

If you will only consider for a minute, you will see directly that it is so. Think of the armies of Babylon and Assyria, the palaces their kings built, the mighty cities that they piled, where are they now? Think of the Medes and Persians, with all their pomp and power, where are their glories now? And Greece—her palaces and her temples are a desolation. Listen to the tramp of Roman armies up the *Via Sacra*, hark to the acclamations of the people as they climb the very chimney-tops to see the conquerors come home, where have they all gone?

Fame did but blow one blast upon her brazen trumpet, and the echoes sounded for a while, and then there was silence. “Surely every man walketh in a vain shew.” Get the idea of a procession and you have caught the thought which David would convey to you. Such, too often, is the whole of a man’s life, just the passing of a pageant and nothing more.

The psalmist then speaks of *life as a worry*, and he says, “Surely they are disquieted.” So they are. How few people are so free from the spirit of the things of this world as to pass through this life quietly? If we could once live in the eternities, we should be calm, and still, and restful, but we live by the moment and the day, and we are all on the worry, and the fidget, and the fret, and the fume, and we know no real rest.

The work of this world, if carried on only as for this world, is well described here, “Surely they are disquieted in vain.” See how they begin life, eager for its joys, its honors, its wealth. Note how they plod, and toil, and labor. How much of brain-work is done by the light of the midnight oil! Many a man agitates his mind, and wearies his spirit, till his life is lost in finding a livelihood. They are trying to live, and lo! life is gone, and they wake up and wonder how it is that they have let it go and have not really lived at all.

Some are all for getting, never for enjoying in any measure, when such men get a sufficiency, it is not sufficient for them. When they get twice that, they are still eager for more and live on in a perpetual worry. Then one has more than another and envy comes in, of all passions one of the most wearing, and when a man has at last all he thought he should ever want, then he is afraid of losing it. Now he is anxious about this, and worried about that, and fretting about the other.

Believe me, there are no people who take the fret of life so much as those who ought to have sense enough to be quit of it, “having food and raiment” they are not “therewith content,” and having taken all that is good for them to carry, they are like a traveler who, having one good substantial staff to help him in his walking, must needs carry a bundle of sticks with him, and so load himself unnecessarily. Is it not so?

Did you ever stand in the Bourse at Paris, or did you ever, by any chance, hear the noise of our own Stock Exchange? The latter place is more difficult to see than the former, but when I have stood upstairs in the Bourse in Paris, and have looked down upon the raving multitude below, I have wondered whether, if Bedlam had been emptied out, there would be more noise, more uproar, more calling out, more pushing and rushing, first this way and then that way.

I could not understand what they were at, perhaps that made the scene appear the more maddening. Every man seemed all alive and as though he would eat up every other man in the place, and I believe that the Bourse is but a picture of mercantile life everywhere—competition, competition, everybody buying cheaply, and grinding down everybody that works, and then complaining that, in his turn he is ground too, his own measure being measured back to him. Ah me, what a life it is!

Had David penned this psalm today, he might have written in capital letters, “SURELY THEY ARE DISQUIETED IN VAIN!” Oh, for a little quiet! Oh, for time to think! Oh, for opportunities to get near to God, and un-bosom all your thoughts and all your cares before Him, and then to go away feeling patience mingled with joy, and joy with the expectation of unutterable bliss, helping us to really live, instead of being disquieted in vain!

Well, next, David passes on to speak of *life as a success*, and he mentions those who were supposed to have been successful in life, though mark you, it is not success in life after all, to accumulate riches. When you read in *The Illustrated London News* that somebody died “worth” so-and-so, do not believe it.

A man is not worth what he has when he dies, a man may not be worth twopence, although he may possess a million, he himself is worth nothing, poor grabber of everything! But you say such and such a man died and left £200,000. Yes, there are several of us who, when we die, will *leave* much more than that.

I shall leave all the world behind me and there are many others here who will do the same, and leave all the millions that there are, and all the estates that ever were, and all the treasures of the world, and I suppose that every one of us, when he shall die, will leave everything behind him, for shrouds have no pockets, and men carry nothing with them into their graves.

But even when a man is successful in heaping up riches, see how David describes it, "He heapeth up riches." That is all, he does not partake of them, he does not use them, he merely heaps them up. He accumulates without enjoyment. When a man has food and raiment, and has what he needs for comfort, all that he has beyond, if counted by thousands, might as well be a thousand pins as a thousand pounds, so far as any good it is to him.

But the bigger heap will not give more comfort, for there is the additional anxiety of taking care of it. When riches are consecrated to God's glory, they assume quite another character, but I am now talking about this world and the mere possession of its treasures. David calls it the heaping up of riches, and that is all that it is, getting a big heap, like children do at the seaside, one gets a bigger heap of sand than another has, but what is the good of that?

The psalmist also says that when the man heaps up riches, he "knoweth not who shall gather them." He hoards without security. This is probably an allusion to the husbandman who has cut down his corn and put the sheaves together, and then at night, before he can gather them into the garner, much less before he can thresh out the grain and grind it, some marauder comes and runs off with it all. The miser heaps up his gold, but he does not know who may gather it. Have we not seen the fruit of many years' toil vanish in an hour? The reaping of a lifetime has disappeared by a panic in a moment.

"He heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them." He leaves his wealth without pleasure. The psalmist alludes to the fact that men cannot tell what will become of their possessions when they die. I am sure that there is many a man who would turn in his grave if he knew what was being done with his hard earned wealth.

To live wholly to enrich somebody about whose character you know so little, seems a poor object in life, and yet it is the only object which many are pursuing. Without chick or child, it may be, still men will go on scraping together riches for some unknown heir who, if they knew him, would be perhaps beneath their contempt, yet they go on working like slaves for one who will never be grateful to them when they are dead.

Now does not the whole of this put together make up a very sorry picture? Yet it is true of the worldling, of the man who has no hope hereafter, of the man who has never projected his soul by grace into the spiritual and the heavenly realm.

II. And now, glad to get away from this part of our subject, we notice how DAVID EXPRESSES HIS OWN EMOTIONS IN CONTEMPLATION OF THESE THINGS.

And first, *he has come to a decision*. Having turned these matters all over, he begins the expression of his own feelings thus, "And now, Lord." I like that mode of speech, it is a great thing to come to God with a "now." You know how the Lord comes to us, He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD." I like a man sometimes to come close up to God and sit down, and seem to say, "Now, Lord, You see that I have realized the vanity of this world, I may well let it all go, for it melts away in my hand, it is a mere shadow which is not worth living for, and I have to live in eternity with You. I have to live in heaven or in hell. O my God, bring me to my bearings! Bring me close up to You, and let us reason together, and have the question out. 'And now, Lord.'"

Every moment is solemn if we would but make it so, but there are certain turning points in life when a man has had his eyes opened to see the fallacy of his former pursuits, when, stopping where the roads

meet, he looks up to the signpost and says, "And now, Lord, guide me, help me to take the right turn, to eschew the shadow, and to seek after that which is substantial. Now, Lord."

I also like this expression of David's emotions because he *consults with God*. "Every man walketh in a vain shew: but," he says, "and now, Lord, there is no vanity with thee, no deception, no delusion with thee, behold, I turn away from this mirage, which just now deluded me, to thee, my God, the Rock of my salvation, and I look to thee. And now, Lord."

I would to God that somebody here would say, "I have to spend eternity somewhere. I will not waste this present time, and live as if this world were all, but I will lift up my prayer tonight and say, Now, Lord, now that I have passed my childhood and am a young man, now that I have reached my twenty-first birthday, now that I am thirty, forty, fifty, now that my hair turns grey, it is time for me to be wise if ever, now, Lord."

And if I am so unhappy as to have a person here who has advanced to the very end of his lease, and has become seventy, and yet still is living for a world that is slipping away from him, I would to God that the Holy Spirit would make him say tonight, "And now, Lord; now I seek Thee, now I turn to Thee."

You can see at once that *David feels that he is out of place*, for he says, "Lord, what wait I for?" He says, "What wait I for? I can see what these fools are waiting for, they are waiting to take their place in the show, they put on their masquerading garments and go out there to take part in the pageant, but I will not go there. I do not belong to any of the classes that make up that show. What wait I for, then? I see the men disquieted in vain, but Lord, I have learned to trust in Thee, then what wait I for? And O my God, I see how others clutch the treasure which they cannot keep, which is not worth the having, for they are soon to leave it, or it quickly leaves them, I am not after that kind of thing, now, Lord, what wait I for?"

He is like a fish out of water, he is a man out of his native country, evidently a stranger and an exile, who is turning to his God, he is a fellow stranger with his God and he says to Him, "Now, Lord, what wait I for?"—a question only God Himself can fully answer.

You observe also, that *he has his eye on the future*. He is a man who is waiting for something. Faith is a high virtue, and waiting upon God is a flower that grows out of it. "What wait I for? I have not found it yet, I am waiting for it, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." Our treasure is not here, it is away there upon the eternal hills, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. The man described in our text is a waiting man, whose chief delight is now in a world that is to come.

And you observe lastly on this point, that *he is a man whose hope is in God*, "My hope is in thee." I have no earthly expectations, but I say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." "Hopes of ever finding anything here which can fill me, or content me, I have long ago abandoned, and now, Lord, my hope is in Thee. It is only Thee, my God, that I desire, and if I get Thee, if I am filled with Thee, if Thou abidest in me, if Thou dost transform me into Thine image, if Thou dost deign to use me for Thy glory, if Thou wilt take me home to dwell with Thee where Jesus is, this is what I wait for, and I wait for nothing else."

We are expectant of good things to come. We are not inhabitants of this country, we are citizens of the New Jerusalem which is above, we are only shipwrecked here for a while, and exiled from home until the boat shall come to ferry us across the stream to the land where our true possessions lie, and where our best Beloved is gone. Life, and light, and love, and everything to us is He who has gone as our Forerunner to the place which He has prepared for them that love Him.

III. Now I close by noticing that DAVID OFFERS AN APPROPRIATE AND NEEDFUL PRAYER, "Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish." After all, we are here, brothers, we do not know how long we may have to stop here, and there are things which we want while we are here. Well, what are they? Send in your requests, what do you want?

David puts down what he wants. "He wants first to be delivered from trouble," says somebody. No, he does not say anything about that, he prays, "Deliver me from all my transgressions." "He wants to be

delivered from that headache, that heartache, that pain in the limbs, that depression of spirit." Nothing of the sort, the prayer of this godly man is, "Deliver me from all my transgressions."

That is, first, *he prayed for deliverance from sins committed*. "Lord, put all my sin away, so that I may be clean every whit from every sin that I have ever committed." Can that be? Oh, yes, it is so with many of us! We are washed in the blood of the lamb, and that washing is perfect washing, it leaves no stain behind it. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, He has taken your sin upon Himself, He has put your sin away by the great blood shedding, it is not on you any longer, it has even ceased to be, according to that wonderful text, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

What a blessed thing it is to live with no cloud whatever between your soul and your God, to know that every sin is blotted out by the atonement of Christ, and that your heavenly Father looks upon you with delight and favor, even as a child of God, and does not chide you!

O happy, happy, happy man who walks in the light, as God is in the light, and so has fellowship with God while the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth him from all sin! David's first prayer is for deliverance from sins committed. If you get it answered in your case, you will not walk in any vain show and you will not be disquieted at all, much less "disquieted in vain."

Next *he prays to be delivered from the assaults of sin*. Who is there here that is not tempted? If anyone says, "I am above temptation, or beyond temptation," well, that person must have gone far in pride and carnal security, he is eaten up with the leprosy of self-deceit. We are all tempted, and every day we need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." "Deliver me from all my transgressions. Lord, do not let me sin, let me not in heart, or thought, or word, or deed, offend Thee." Oh, if we could but be perfect, so that we could never manifest an ugly temper, never speak a wry word, never have an evil thought! Oh, if we could but be perfect!

Ah, sirs, this is the riches we covet, to be perfectly free from every tendency to sin! If we could but get to that, then we should have got to heaven, for that is heaven, to be perfectly delivered from sin. Well, well, we shall have that perfection, God will give it to us, but let us make this the subject of our daily prayer, "Deliver me from all my transgressions."

David also *prayed for deliverance from peculiarly dangerous sins*. Allow me to put an emphasis on one little word in my text, "Deliver me from *all* my transgressions." I am afraid that we all have some special sin that is our sin more than it is anybody else's, some tendency, hereditary, perhaps some liability to a particular form of sin.

I do believe that if some brethren were ever tempted to hilarity, they would not transgress in that direction, for they were born in November, and they have a fog in their very soul. There are some others, who, if they were tempted to great depression, would not transgress in that way, for they have sunlight in their souls, and their eyes always twinkle with a natural merriment. Some men are not tempted to be misers, it would be a mercy if they were, for they are such dreadful spendthrifts. Some men are never tempted to be lavish, I half wish that the devil or someone better would tempt them that way, for they are so mean, and it is so hard to get even a threepenny piece from them to help the best of causes.

Satan is pretty well acquainted with us, he sees the joints in our harness, he knows to what sins we are specially inclined, and if it be so in sinners, it is so in saints also. We all have need to pray, "Deliver me from all my transgressions, especially from the sins to which I am most liable. Lord, save me from them." I invite you, dear friend, to pray this prayer of David.

And then pray the other also, "Make me not the reproach of the foolish. If I am to be reproached, let me be reproached by wise men, but make me not the reproach of the foolish."

Thus, *David prayed for deliverance from deserved dishonor*. Oh, may God grant that none of you, whom He has called to a higher and better life, and made to long for glory and eternity, may ever make the enemy to blaspheme, or give them real reason for despising you! God keep us from falling! O Christian men, Christ has been more wounded by His friends than by His foes! We do not mind what the infidel has to say, at least we would not mind it if you did not at times help him to say sad things by your

inconsistency. We feel the point of the arrow, and the smart of the wound is acute, but keener far is it to feel that your own wrongdoing feathered the arrow which the enemy shot from his bow. God keep us from that evil! May we never lend a feather from our wings with which to furnish an arrow against Christ or His cause!

David also prayed to be preserved from undeserved defamation, “Make me not the reproach of the foolish.” If you live the life of an angel, foolish persons will soon spread an ill story against you. Unless the Lord holds their tongues, they will not hold them. Pray then, that you may be preserved from slander. If it comes, may it be real slander, with no truth in it, but may God preserve you even from that, for it is a cruel thing, and cuts to the quick!

Again, *David prayed for deliverance from spiritual disappointment*, and may we also be preserved from all disappointments concerning our trust in God! If we trusted in God, and He did not deliver us, we would be indeed the reproach of the foolish. We come out boldly for the truth of God, and stand alone, and yet that truth never vindicates us, why then, we shall be the reproach of the foolish! We pray that we may not be put to shame, and that God's bare arm may defend His own cause, and we believe it will be so.

And last of all, in his prayer, “Make me not the reproach of the foolish,” *David pleads for deliverance from dreadful taunts at the last*. May I never be lost, and then for ever have to bear this reproach! You know, the thought has sometimes come to me that if I am not true, and if at the last great day the Master should say, “I never knew you, depart, ye cursed,” how will those who have to depart with me turn round and say, “And *you*, and *you*? You talked to us, you preached to us, and yet you are here yourself.”

This would be to suffer shame as did the king of Babylon when he went down to the pit, and the kings whom he had slain began to say to him, “Art thou become like one of us?” How they gloried over their conqueror, himself shut up in hell, conquered by the Almighty God! Professors, I beseech you to pray this prayer tonight, “Make me not the reproach of the foolish.” Be sincere, true men, lest on the last day you not only have the wrath of God to bear, but the shame and the everlasting contempt which your fellow sinners will heap upon you while you lie there, after all your profession, a castaway.

The Lord grant His blessing to those who are to be baptized tonight! May they be faithful to the end and may others of us, who have confessed Christ years ago, be kept from sin! May we all trust Christ tonight! If we never trusted Jesus before, let us begin at once, each one saying, “Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee.” May we all come to Jesus, and find eternal life in Him! Amen, and amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 39

To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.

David dedicated some psalms to Asaph, and one or two to Jeduthun. Some of this chief musician's family appear to have remained singers as late as the time of Nehemiah. It is a great honor to be a singer in the house of God. Ungodly men have no right to lead the psalmody, only redeemed lives can sing aright the song of redemption. I reckon that it is almost as wrong to have an unconverted person to lead the singing as it would be to have an unconverted man to preach the Gospel.

David was in a great heat of spirit, and much tried, when he wrote this psalm. There is little that is cheerful in it, yet there is much that may cheer us. Sometimes, when we are unusually thoughtful, we are more likely to be blessed than at other times. Specific gravity is better than specific levity, there are some who have a great deal of the latter quality.

Verse 1. *I said.*

“I thought it, and at last I said it. I resolved, I determined upon it, and I registered the vow.”

1. *I will take heed to my ways,—*

Men never go right by accident, he who is heedless is graceless. A holy life is a life that comes of taking heed.

1. *That I sin not with my tongue:*

He who keeps his tongue can keep all the rest of his body. The tongue is the helm of the ship, and if that be well managed, the ship will be steered aright. How many sins of the tongue there are—proud words, false words, trifling words, unclean words! I cannot mention the whole list. The tongue is the best thing in the world or the worst thing, according to how it is savored.

1. *I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.*

“I may feel free when I am with God’s people, then I may wear my heart upon my sleeve, for there are no daws to peck at it. But when I am with the wicked, I must not cast my pearls before swine. I must be careful what I say, for they will be sure to misunderstand and misrepresent me.”

2. *I was dumb with silence,—*

Ah, me! how often we do wrong even when we try to do right! He tried not to sin with his tongue, so he was silent, but silence itself may be a sin of the tongue. God forgive our idle silence, and silence our idle words! I do not think we often sin this way, but silence may sometimes be more wicked than speech, even though at other times, speech is silver and silence is golden. If silence is sometimes better than speech, it may also be worse. So poor David, like a pendulum, swings first this way and then the other way. Yet he went too far in the silent direction.

2. *I held my peace, even from good;*

Which he should not have done. A dumb sorrow is a heavy sorrow.

2. *And my sorrow was stirred.*

Or “troubled.” Water while it is quiet may look clear, the sediment lies still at the bottom, but if you stir it, you see all there is in it. So is it with sorrow, when it is stirred, you find its bitterness.

3. *My heart was hot within me,—*

The fire was kept in his heart, it was not allowed space to break forth, so his heart was hot as an oven.

3. *While I was musing, the fire burned:*

He grew so hot with grief that he was compelled to speak.

3. *Then spake I with my tongue,—*

I am not sure that he did not sin then. We sin if we are silent, and we sin if we speak, for we are such sinful creatures. It would have been better perhaps, if David had said, “Lord, help me to take heed to my way and rule Thou over my tongue,” for as it was, you see, he could not manage his tongue. He was either too fast or too slow. However, this time he spoke well, for he spoke to God. More talk to God and less chat to men, and we would be wiser and better.

4. *LORD, make me to know mine end,—*

It is greatly wise for us to be familiar with our last hours. There is much to be discovered in the shroud, the mattock and the spade.

4. *And the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.*

A bubble is more substantial than I am—a little handful of dust, easily blown in the wind, rather an appearance than a reality. Ah, me! little do we know, any of us, how frail we are.

5. *Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth;*

How short is our life! It is just a span and no more.

5. *And mine age is as nothing before thee:*

What multitudes of generations of men have come and gone! An angel might have cried long before, “Man is but a thing of yesterday compared with the eternal God.” God created the first star that twinkled out of the primeval darkness. “The everlasting hills,” as we call them, are but infants of a day compared to Him, therefore, man may truly say, “Mine age is as nothing before thee.”

5. *Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.*

The best man is only man at the best, and when he is at his best, he is nothing but vanity. It is strange that he should get vain of his best state, when his best is only vanity.

6. *Surely every man walketh in a vain shew:*

He is a shadow walking among shadows.

6. *Surely they are disquieted in vain:*

They fret and fume about nothing.

6. *He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.*

He is busy with a rake, but another will be busy with a fork. What the miser gathers the spendthrift scatters.

7. *And now, Lord, what wait I for?*

“Do I wait to gather riches for another to squander? Do I wait to worry myself? Do I wait here to walk as a vanity in the midst of vanities? No, Lord, I am waiting for something better than that!”

7. *My hope is in thee.*

Here the psalmist steps off the sand and puts his foot on the rock. Happy is the man who can say to the Lord, “My hope is in thee.”

8. *Deliver me from all my transgressions:*

When he gets near to God, he sees himself to be a sinner.

8-9. *Make me not the reproach of the foolish. I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.*

That is fine silence when a man will not complain because his affliction comes from the hand of God. There is something better even than that when a man breaks the silence and begins to praise God under the rod. A mute Christian smarting under the rod is a wonder of grace, but a singing Christian under a cutting stroke is a still greater miracle of mercy. Such ought all Christians to be.

10. *Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.*

When God smites, He never plays at chastisement, and there are times when His blows are very heavy, and then the smitten one cries out, “Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.”

11. *When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth:*

Stout, he is reduced to a shadow, comely and beautiful, he is wrinkled and looks like a skeleton, joyful and blithe, he ends his day in mourning. Ah, dear friends, we who have joy, and calm, and peace, ought to be very grateful! Praise God while you can, for it may be that a dark night will follow the bright day. Oh, for grace to praise God even then! That is the best of music that comes from God's nightingales. Music by night is music indeed.

But when God corrects men, how soon He takes them down!

11-12. *Surely every man is vanity. Selah. Hear my prayer, O LORD,—*

“If I cannot do anything else, I can pray, and I will pray.” That is the best relief that mourners have, “Hear my prayer, O LORD.”

12. *And give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears:*

“Do not see me weeping, and yet refuse me comfort and relief. Do not, I pray thee, hear my cry, and yet turn thy back upon me.”

12. *For I am a stranger with thee,—*

Notice, not a stranger *to* Thee, but “a stranger *with* Thee. You are a stranger in Your own world and I also am a stranger here.” Men will not entertain the King, for they know Him not, therefore—

*“’Tis no surprising thing,
That we should be unknown:
The Jewish world knew not their King,
God's everlasting Son.”*

“I am a stranger with thee.” There is a sweet familiarity about this expression, as if the psalmist said, “Lord, I am not at home. I am a stranger here, and You too, are a stranger, men will not acknowledge You. Therefore, Lord, sympathize with me. Hold not Your peace at my tears, for I am a stranger with You.”

12. *And a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

“You are my Host, I am Your guest, You do entertain me. Lord, look at my tears! When the good man entertains a stranger, then he is kind, he pours oil and wine into his wounds. Lord, do so with me, You are the Good Samaritan, and I am a stranger with You, and a sojourner, a temporary guest with You in this world, as all my fathers were.”

13. *O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*

There is much sweet comfort here, though the psalm reads like a dirge, rather than a hymn. God give us, if we are obliged to sing such words as these, to sing them with a full belief that the Lord will hear us, and will bless our trials to us, and make them work our lasting good!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—39, 657, 823

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.